

Should your business host an intern from a local school?

Absolutely, say project participants

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Say the word “intern” to some businesses and their first reaction may be a groan. That’s because taking on a summer intern can require time and energy to create a meaningful experience. Is the effort worth it?

Lisa Keohokalole Schauer, president of PointNorth Consulting in Vancouver, Washington feels passionately that it is.

“This is how we all need to pay it forward and help a college student navigate career choices,” she said. “But hosting an intern also guarantees that your team will learn a lot and be reenergized about your field. Interns bring in youthful energy, new ideas, fresh ways of thinking of things and challenge the status quo immediately in your business.”

PointNorth Consulting hired three summer interns in 2021. One, Armando Antonio, came to the business through the Future Leaders Project. Established in 2020, the Future Leaders Project is an initiative of the Columbia River Economic Development Council, Workforce Southwest Washington and WSU Vancouver. The purpose is to connect students from historically underrepresented communities with Clark County employers. The project is modeled on the Emerging Leaders Internship in Portland, according to Darcy Hoffman, the director of business services for Workforce Southwest Washington.

“Our community is becoming more diverse, which we can see in the demo-

graphics of our K-12 students,” she said. “We want to make sure that leaders in our community are diversifying at the same rate and creating a space for these students to build social networks with leaders. We also want these future leaders to develop a sense of community, so they stay here and work here.”

She noted that as a smaller city between Seattle and Portland, Vancouver business leaders worry about “brain drain” as young talent may leave the area for other opportunities. In 2021, 10 local companies participated in the Future Leaders Project, representing financial, tech, communications and nonprofit industries. For 2022, Hoffman said the project hopes to recruit 15-20 businesses to host interns.

Alice Marchuk, a marketing strategist for Edge Networks in Vancouver, found that having an intern from the Future Leaders Project available to work on some daily duties freed her to concentrate on larger plans.

“The whole process requires patience in the beginning, but I do think it is worth it,” she said. “Helping our intern, Brittney, learn new skills was helpful for us too. Teaching others is a good way to learn.”

Brittney Erdmann, a junior at WSU Vancouver, applied to the Future Leaders Proj-

ect on a whim. The 27-year-old is changing careers, taking a degree in marketing and professional sales.

“Future Leaders set me up with five different companies that I interviewed with,” she said. “Working at Edge Networks was an incredible experience. I feel like I have so much hands-on experience now. I didn’t expect to get that before graduating.”

During her internship, Erdmann worked on blog posts, search engine optimization, keyword research, customer relationship management with Sales Hub and other tasks. She says the opportunity solidified



Emerging Leaders Internship

A Portland-based group, the Emerging Leaders Internship (ELI) matches college students and recent graduates with local companies for paid internships. Participating students come from traditionally underrepresented populations. A mission of the program is to create an inclusive talent pipeline for Portland. More than 300 interns have participated in the program. To learn more and apply as either a student or a business, visit www.emergingleaderspdx.org.

her decision that she is on the right career track.

To participate, businesses commit to providing a paid internship of \$15 an hour for 200 hours as a minimum. Hoffman said some companies do more, and some continue to work with the students after the end of the official internship.

Though real-world work experience is a key component of the project, Hoffman said connecting to leaders who may help students later in their career growth is another goal. The pandemic restricted social opportunities, but she hopes they will be able to offer more in-person events soon. They also hope to expand internships to include students from community colleges. At this time, only rising juniors and seniors at WSU Vancouver are eligible to apply.

“We are prioritizing our outreach for recruiting students of color or with disabilities, first generation college students and other underrepresented groups,” Hoffman said. “Our application is very simple. There is no GPA requirement and students don’t have to know for certain what they want to do for a career. We want this to be accessible. Our goal is to include people, not screen them out.”



Becoming a Future Leader

Applications will open for college students enrolled at WSU Vancouver in February 2022 for summer internships through the Future Leaders Project. For more information or to apply, please visit <https://studentaffairs.vancouver.wsu.edu/engaged-learning-career-action-center/future-leaders-project>